

Suffering, Death & Palliative Care

Ethical issues of medically
assisted death and palliative care
in a pluralistic world

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Advanced European Bioethics Course

Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 24-27 March 2026

Radboudumc

Introduction

New developments in health care strengthen the promise of a better life for everyone. This process also influences the way societies deal with the end of life and with questions regarding the meaning of suffering and death.

International debates often centre around the question whether medically hastening death is a proper means to preserve human dignity and quality of life. The other side of this issue is palliative care as the active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment.

Questions raised by these developments require thorough conceptual interpretation as well as ethical reflection. Objective of this course is to educate the participants on two main aspects: ethical questions of palliative care and medically assisted death, and philosophical, ethical and medical reflections on the concepts of death and suffering.

Subjects and methods

The course consists of a series of (interactive) lectures, small group case discussions, and audiovisual materials centred around a variety of topics:

Autonomy, vulnerability and dependence; the concept of suffering; assisted suicide and euthanasia; ethical issues in palliative sedation; spiritual and cultural diversity; rituals and symbols around death and dying.

Our healthcare humanities approach to these contemporary issues includes ethics and philosophy, social sciences, visual arts, spirituality and ritual studies.

The diversity among both faculty and participants stimulates fruitful exchange of ideas and enhances understanding of others' professional and cultural perspectives on suffering, death and palliative care. The course language is English.

Keynote

The keynote lecture will be held by a renowned researcher in the broad field of end-of-life research. This year's keynote speaker is dr. Brenda Mathijssen, Associate Professor Geography and Psychology of Religion, Vice Dean and Director of Education at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. As a scientist, she studies how people deal with dying, death and grief in contemporary Europe. She wrote several books, scientific articles, reports, and pieces for peer-reviewed journals.

"I enjoyed the variety of content, new ways of thinking, small group discussions"

Programme

Tuesday | Introduction to palliative care, death and dying

Wednesday | Ethical and philosophical issues in palliative care

Thursday | Practice of end-of-life care

Friday | Existential issues at the end-of-life

Faculty

- *Theo Boer* PhD, professor of medical ethics, Protestant Theological University Groningen
- *Enny Das* PhD, professor of communication and persuasion, Radboud University Nijmegen
- *Marianne Dees* PhD, general physician, post-doctoral researcher, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Michael Echteld* MSc, Senior Advisor and Project Manager at Pharos - centre of expertise focused on reducing health inequalities
- *Jelle van Gorp* PhD, associate professor clinical bioethics, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Gert Olthuis* PhD, associate professor medical humanities, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Carel Veldhoven* MD, department of Anaesthesiology, Pain and Palliative Medicine, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Kris Vissers* MD PhD, professor in pain and palliative care, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Els van Wijngaarden* PhD, associate professor, dept. of Anaesthesiology, Pain and Palliative Medicine, Radboud University Medical Center Nijmegen
- *Joanna Wojtkowiak* PhD, assistant professor, Department of Humanist Chaplaincy Studies, University of Humanistic Studies Utrecht

“I appreciated the various international perspectives – a wealth of experience from many health care disciplines from around the world”

“It was a perfect mixture of active and passive learning”

Practical information

Participants

Previous participants for this course came from diverse professional backgrounds, such as medicine, nursing, pastoral care, health care administration, ethics, philosophy, theology, and PhD students in these areas.

At the conclusion of the course participants will receive a certificate. Participants are reminded that they may be eligible for continuing education credits from their professional association. Accreditation from the Dutch Medical Association (KNMG) and the Dutch register for Pastoral Carers (SKGV) will be applied for. Please contact the programme coordinators for further details or if you have any questions regarding this issue.

Course fees and payments

The course fee is € 945. There is an early bird discount of € 105 for registration before 23 January 2026. This price includes tuition and course materials, as well as refreshments, three lunches and one dinner. Please read the terms and conditions, to be found on our website, before registering for the course.

Course management

Course coordinator: Gert Olthuis PhD

Gert Olthuis is associate professor of medical humanities at the Radboud university medical center in Nijmegen.

Contact information and registration

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Please visit our [website](#), where you will find all the information as well as a registration form for this course.